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## SOME RURAL SOCIAL SURVEYS—DISCUSSION

PAUL S. PEIRCE.—During the past four years three surveys similar to those just described have been made under direction of the department of economics and sociology at the State University of Iowa. The size and general character of the units were the same: namely, two rural townships containing no towns or villages, and one township containing a village of some 560 inhabitants, which, however, was not embraced in the survey of rural conditions. Though planned independently and differing somewhat in detail and emphasis, these university surveys were much the same in scope as those directed by Professor Von Tungeln. But the method of procedure was quite different, since each of our surveys was made by a graduate student, who had lived for some time in the township studied and whose local interest and acquaintanceship were determining factors in the selection of the particular units for investigation. After study of the general literature of rural economics and sociology and examination of the few surveys which had previously been made in other states, these men were assisted in drawing up an outline and a questionnaire. Thus equipped, each undertook a house to house canvass of his entire township. Information so gained was supplemented by examination of state and federal census materials, public records at the county courthouse, books of township and district school officials, records of teachers, of pastors and Sunday Schools, newspapers, and other miscellaneous sources. Personal observation of institutions and conditions, as well as interviews or correspondence with persons in position to speak authoritatively on special points, yielded additional data. Each of these young men carried through his investigation with gratifying enthusiasm, determination, and care.

Their fields presented some noteworthy contrasts to those selected by Professor Von Tungeln. All three townships are in the southern or southeastern parts of the state. They are areas of older settlement and cultivation, of somewhat lower average fertility, of slightly smaller farms (averaging 132 acres), of populations in which the foreign element is even less significant than in Orange and Lone Tree townships. In each township the average family is also smaller and in each the total population is less than in 1870. The three townships represent three distinct types. One is a comparatively rough and adverse region bordering the coal-mining section in the southern tier of counties, in which stock raising predominates and corn is the prevailing crop. Another is in the second tier of counties and farther east;

here corn and live-stock have long been the chief interest, but in recent years cattle raising has been declining while there has been a remarkable revival of wheat culture. The third township is doubtless one of the most prosperous and representative mixed-farming areas in eastern Iowa. Obviously some of these communities are less progressive than Orange and Lone Tree townships; possibly some would even be called "clam-like."

A hasty comparison of results of these two sets of surveys reveals many parallelisms and not a few contrasts, some of which are to the advantage of one group and some to that of the other. Any detailed comparison is of course impossible on this occasion. Even if time permitted, the essentially local interest of such details would render their presentation before this national body inappropriate. Rather will my brief remarks relate to broader aspects; to questions as to the method, purposes, shortcomings, and possibilities of such studies.

First of all I wish to commend the method outlined by Professor Von Tungeln for the inauguration, supervision, and execution of rural surveys. Community coöperation with trained supervisors and field experts should yield valuable returns, both in facts ascertained and in the education of the community. I also appreciate the motives which prompted the choice of alert and advanced communities for the first application of the plan. The author of the paper seems, however, to minimize both the possibilities and the profitableness of studies in average and laggard townships. Our experience in southeastern Iowa has demonstrated the possibility of gathering much definite and illuminating information concerning such townships, even without the more elaborate machinery at the disposal of an institution whose major service is to the rural interests of the state and without the generous coöperation to be expected from a community already awakening. Whether such efforts are worth while, depends largely upon the purpose of the local survey. If it is merely to hold up a little mirror before each community so that it may see itself in a true light, then more may be revealed to a community which has open eyes and a sympathetic attitude. If in addition the aim is to afford data for the scientific study of social and economic questions, to enlighten the larger public concerning conditions within their commonwealth, and to afford guidance toward corrective and remedial legislation, then the survey should be applied to as many different types of communities as possible. To be sure no two townships are precisely alike; neither is it possible to say to what extent a given township is typical. And yet no one, I suppose, would seriously propose an intensive study of

every township in the state. Clearly some of the more lethargic and laggard should be included in the list of those chosen for close inspection. If so, their turn cannot await the coming of that fine spirit of coöperation predicted in the paper just read. Nor, if handled tactfully, need the utilization of data thus gathered be regarded as "showing up" the townships studied. The findings of a series of local surveys might well be analyzed, digested, and compared; and the more important features published in monographs or bulletins which would give a true comparative or composite representation of conditions, without identifying exactly the communities referred to.

As a matter of fact, not a little of the usefulness of modern social and economic surveys has been lost through lack of courage to paint the picture true to life. It is right and proper to commend the good features of a community; but it is quite as important to set forth its bad features as well. Another temptation is to try to cover such a wide range of phenomena and so many diverse aspects of the community situation that the project becomes unwieldy and its objectives are obscured. Surveys of this general type are doubtless better adapted to small rural areas than to complex urban centers; but much might be said for more specialized investigations, especially into the economic relations of country life. There is also danger that surveys will degenerate into mere collection and tabulation of facts and figures, without adequate interpretation, without constructive suggestions for the betterment of conditions, even without due attention to sound statistical method. Of course the value of general surveys also depends in no small measure upon sound judgment in the selection of criteria of social well-being and in the relative weight given to the variegated data secured, but who is sure just what are the true criteria of rural well-being? Just what, for example, is the comparative significance of power washers, indoor toilets, and vacuum cleaners? Of water supply, drainage and housing conditions? Of telephones and mail order patronage? Of wages and hours of labor? Of rotation of crops and short-term cash rent systems? By what token and standard are we to decide that Orange Township or any other rural unit has attained the goal of social efficiency?

Despite these numerous questions and pitfalls, the further prosecution of such studies is altogether worthy of encouragement. They should proceed with reference to some large plan and purpose, and should be kept up until they afford an adequate basis for conclusions with reference, not only to the immediate localities sampled, but to

the larger areas of which they are presumably representative. Moreover survey findings should be given the most effective publicity. Their vital lessons should reach the people and not be buried in the libraries of experts. Like other facts gleaned and principles established by economists and sociologists, they could be more largely serviceable if made more readily available for use through university extension agencies; for in many states the extension director is playing a larger and larger part in the moulding of community sentiment and social ideals and is recognizing that many of the problems with which he is to deal are fundamentally economic.

GEO. H. VON. TUNGELN.—Professor Peirce raised the question whether or not it is of any great importance to know how many bathtubs and the like the farmers have. In the survey work that Professor Peirce himself directed, and of which he has told us briefly, his graduate students ascertained the number and kinds of papers and magazines that the farmer took, and the number and kind of musical instruments there were in the farmer's home. I am not sure but from a scientific standpoint it is quite as important to know what opportunities the farmer has for taking a bath and of enjoying a modern home as it is to know what the farmer reads and the kind of musical instruments which furnish his musical entertainment.

Then, too, we frequently hear it said that one of the causes for young men and young women leaving the farm is the dearth of modern conveniences in the home. If this is a real cause, is it not worth while for society to know just how far this cause is being removed through the introduction into the farm homes of these conveniences? I believe that many will agree with me in expressing the belief that it is well for society to know more about the condition under which our rural people live.